



THE ROOTS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE: UNDERSTANDING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN MODERN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the complex problem of juvenile crimes worldwide, with a focus on the United States. It highlights the alarming statistic that 424,300 children are arrested annually and explores the complexities of the biological, social, and physical factors that contribute to violent behavior among the youth, specifically focusing on the influence of social media, video games, family relationships, and peer pressure. Famous incidents such as the Bethel Regional High School shooting and case studies involving acts of individuals such as Salvador Ramos and Warren Leblanc demonstrate the massive impact of those factors on youths. This paper argues that these root causes must be studied and understood to generate a safer environment for youth in the future.

KEYWORDS: : Juvenile Delinquency, Youth Crime, Social Media, Video Gaming, Family Dynamics, Peer Pressure, Violence, Mental Health, Interventions, Community Support, Behavioral Outcomes, Root Causes

INTRODUCTION

In the USA, 424,300 children are arrested every year (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2020); a number roughly equivalent to the entire population of Iceland. The complexity of juvenile crime presents a challenge to our society, and it is becoming clear that there is a need to understand the root causes of juvenile crime in order to create a safer environment for our children. This has sparked widespread discussions about the causes of this complex problem. Juveniles who commit violent crimes do so for various reasons—a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors that lead to juvenile delinquency. Peer pressure, family dynamics, exposure to violent video games, and the influence of social media all contribute to this problem by influencing young people's thoughts and actions towards illegal activities. For instance, studies have shown that social media can amplify peer pressure, leading to riskier behaviors, while violent video games may desensitize youths to aggression. Identifying and addressing these complex factors is not just beneficial but necessary to find effective solutions to the problem of juvenile delinquency. This paper will evaluate the core factors that influence juveniles to engage in illegal activities, specifically examining how social media, video gaming, family dynamics, and peer pressure contribute to juvenile delinquency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of juvenile delinquency, particularly in school settings, has earned significant attention in certain years. This literature review arranges results from different studies and articles investigating the psychological, social, and environmental factors contributing to youth violent behavior.

Youth Arrests and Crime Trends

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

(n.d.) highlights the approximated number of youth arrests, showing an alarming drift in juvenile crime rates. The report states that numerous factors support these captures, as well as socioeconomic factors, family relationships, and peer pressure. This understanding of juvenile delinquency sets the phrase for more profound examinations into specified cases of violence.

Case Studies in Juvenile Violence

A well-known case is Evan Ramsey, who, at the age of 16, committed a school shooting at Bethel Regional High School in 1997. As indicated by IResearchNet (n.d.), the cause of Ramsey's violent actions was familial instability and serious bullying. Each of these factors played a crucial role in influencing his future actions. His experiences reflect a pattern where issues from family relationships and school environments contribute to violent outcomes. Likewise, the case reported by Levenson et al. (2022) highlights how personal isolation and bullying increase one's aggression. The suspect, Salvador Ramos, was described as a social loner who has been bullied multiple times in the past, highlighting the contribution of bullying and social isolation to violent actions.

The Influence of Media

The influence of media, especially violent video games, has been linked to a connection with youth violence. Ng (2023) presents research suggesting a relationship between exposure to violent video games and aggressive behavior in youth. The study proposes that teenagers are sufficiently at risk of these influences, potentially leading to violent acts. In addition, the "Killing 'incited by video game'" article by Blackstock (2004) further supports the argument, warning that such consumption of media should be carefully examined.

This review on juvenile delinquency reveals a complex

interaction between factors such as family dynamics, bullying, and media influence, better understanding some core factors of youth violence and preventing further incidents.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a secondary qualitative methodology to explore the root causes of juvenile delinquency. The study synthesizes data from existing literature, case studies, and credible reports to examine how factors like family dynamics, social media, peer pressure, and video gaming influence youth violence. This approach was chosen for its ability to analyze diverse perspectives and provide a comprehensive understanding of pre-existing evidence. However, the reliance on secondary sources may limit the ability to incorporate real-time insights or newly emerging trends. Despite these limitations, the methodology effectively identifies patterns and underlying causes essential for addressing juvenile delinquency.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Media and Youth Violence

The correlation between video gaming, social media, and juvenile delinquency raises important questions regarding the ways these digital platforms may shape youth behavior and influence their choices.

In Korea in 2017, an eight-year-old elementary student was abducted and murdered by Ms. Kim, a high school dropout. Her dead body was brutally cut into pieces and abandoned. According to the prosecution, the girl (Miss A) was playing at a children's park when she approached Kim intentionally to contact her mother; she was then lured to Kim's apartment since she claimed that her cell phone had run out of battery. Once in her apartment, she distracted the child with a cat and then strangled her with a PC charging cable. Before this ruthless murder took place, Kim met Park in an online Twitter community, where violent themes were discussed. Since both shared an interest in the thriller *Webtoon*, they got along very well. This obsession slowly turned into a bloodthirsty fascination and thrill of violence. According to the prosecution, Park had known about the murder and encouraged and supported Kim to commit the murder. Park was the major influence on Kim's actions. A few hours prior to this, Kim had searched for items such as "murder" and "bizarre," indicating a deep thought with violent content. Those violent searches may have exposed Kim to additional disturbing content that normalized violence or provided misguided reasons for her actions. The exposure to violent content could have strengthened her already distorted perceptions and led her to feel more justified in carrying out the crime.

Continuing with the discussion of how social media influences violent acts, it is crucial to consider the role that video games place in influencing teens' attitudes and behaviors. According to research conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong, teenagers are significantly more influenced by violent video games than adults, showing an 8% increase in youth crimes after the release of popular violent games. Common types of crimes include property destruction and drug-related offenses, which are very common in video games (Ng, 2024).

On July 29, 2004, 17-year-old Warren Leblanc stabbed and beat Stefan Pakeerah repeatedly with a hammer, mimicking the video game *Manhunt*. According to Leblanc's friends, he had become obsessed with the game's brutal gameplay that encouraged violent killing. The aim of the game is to kill viciously using weapons like knives and wedgehammers, making it inappropriate for teens. During the trial, Leblanc's mother blamed the game for its "brutally violent scenes," which underage individuals like Leblanc and Pakeerah should not have been exposed to. Pakeerah's father stated that there is a connection between the game and Leblanc's actions, reinforcing the argument that games like this, which influence young minds, should be banned (Blackstock, 2004).

Considering these disturbing cases and the data showing that violent content leads to aggressive behavior, it is important to reconsider the accessibility of such platforms for young people to protect their mental health and well-being.

Family Environment and Youth Violence

Violence and family environments significantly impact how young individuals behave and make decisions. In Bogota, Columbia, juvenile delinquency rates have been rising rapidly recently. The commander of the local protection department believes that the lack of parental presence, love, and communication in any family structure can lead young individuals to increase engagement in delinquent behavior as social standards and family dynamics shift. For instance, if a child is born into an adverse family environment, there is a high chance that they might enter the 'wrong path'. He also warned that criminal traits in young people are "a general product that develops from the repetition of behaviors to which they are exposed in their family environment."

Edwin Olya, criminal profiler of the Attorney's General Office, stated that biological and physical factors are unignorable, which together might trigger unexpected behaviors such as homicide. Furthermore, he explains that most juvenile criminals are "defined by personal life experience," where they were also victims or had to be "exposed to complicated contexts" that led them to normalize violence in their lives. These types of crimes would not be found in the north of Bogota, but the crime rates have risen rapidly in southern parts of Bogota, like San Cristobal, Usme, and Ciudad Bolivar. This is because most impoverished families gather in the south; including families with disadvantaged backgrounds such as divorce, lack of parental guidance, and normalization of violence (Toro, 2024). Even a spark of violence in a poor family environment can ignite flames for adolescents to commit crimes. Andrei Romanovitch Chikatilo, or "The Butcher of Rostov," was a Ukrainian/Russian-born man known for his inhumane acts of sexually assaulting, murdering, and mutilating at least 52 women and children between 1978 and 1990 (Tepfenheart, 2018). Growing up with a serial killer father, his son Yuri fell into the same paths as his father. He was responsible for the brutal murders of 5 women and 10 robberies in Moscow (Quinn, 2024). Yuri had perfectly exhibited the phrase "like father, like son." It is evident that the impact of family environments, especially in cases of extreme violence and neglect, can profoundly shape

the behaviors and actions of young individuals, potentially perpetuating cycles of violence across generations.

Peer Pressure and Youth Violence

The weight and social elements of school life can, in some cases, lead powerless youth down the path of adolescent wrongdoing as they capitulate to the impact of peer groups that lock in hazardous or criminal behaviors. In 1987, 15-year-old Johnny Carrasquillo was accused of murdering 26-year-old Ruben Martinez-Cruz during a quarrel over stolen cocaine. According to Carrasquillo, he had gone to Cristabal Martinez's apartment on Saturday night when Luis Rodriguez accused Martinez-Cruz of stealing an ounce of cocaine. "Ruben came up to my face," Carrasquillo stated. "Luis has told him that I was the one who said that he stole the cocaine." He claimed that Martinez-Cruz came up to his face angrily and was going to take his life. Martinez-Cruz had a gun tucked in the back of his pants and had already clicked it before he gave it to Carrasquillo. Cristabel and Luis were telling Carrasquillo to shoot. If he doesn't shoot, they'll "do" him (Gross & Tonello, 1987). Confronted with serious weight from his peers, Carrasquillo eventually felt caught, driving him to form a devastating choice that would alter his life forever. The fact that Martinez and Rodriguez were pressuring Carrasquillo to shoot Martinez-Cruz perfectly shows how peer pressure can force adolescents—like Carrasquillo—into risky circumstances where they feel forced to behave immorally, mirroring dynamics that also exist in educational settings.

In school, students often face similar pressures to conform to their peers' expectations, leading them to make impulsive decisions that can have serious consequences. Salvador Ronaldo Ramos was involved in a school shooting in Texas, where 19 children and 2 teachers were murdered (Levenson et al., 2022). He was bullied as a child due to a speech impediment, which led to a troubled social life and increasing isolation. Over the years, friends noticed a shift in his conduct, including violent inclinations and self-harm. He had a difficult upbringing, with a mother who battled drug addiction and many arguments at home. He was engaged in troubling actions prior to the shooting, such as sharing pictures of guns on social media. Ramos's health issues were untreated, evidenced by his self-harming behaviors and unsettling acts like shooting BB guns at random individuals (Klemko et al., 2022). Salvador Ramos serves as an example of how social isolation and bullying may cause helpless youth to feel hopeless and angry, which can then turn into violent action. His experiences of being teased and shunned by his peers underscored the negative consequences of a poisonous school environment and furthered his emotional decline. It emphasizes how urgently bullying and mental health concerns must be addressed, together with the need for effective treatments and support networks, in order to keep vulnerable young people from turning to criminal activity.

Counterarguments

While some may argue that social media and video games serve as harmless forms of internet usage that provide entertainment for youth, it is critical to recognize that these platforms can also promote negative influences, especially coupled with difficult

family settings and peer pressure. Research has shown that exposure to violent content in video games or social media might suppress young people to aggressiveness, whereas social media often amplifies peer pressure, leading to risky behaviors that contribute to juvenile delinquency. According to studies constructed by the American Psychological Association, they found relationships between real-life violent video games and aggressive behavior, especially among men and people with forceful identities. Furthermore, a negative relationship between time spent playing video games and academics was also noted. Results showed that participants reportedly played an average of 2.14 hours a week, and *Mortal Kombat*, a violent action game between characters, is named the third favorite by 58 students (27%). Results show that forceful delinquent behavior was related to both one's trait of aggression and exposure to gameplay violence. Additionally, time spent playing video games was also correlated with delinquent behavior, but not as strongly as direct exposure to video game violence (Anderson et al., 2002). This concern is illustrated perfectly with the example of the Bethel Regional High School shooting. On February 19th, 1997, 16-year-old Evan Ramsey shot 2 people and wounded 2 others. He had a difficult childhood, with a father who was in prison, a mother who always drank, and an abusive foster home. It was no better for him in school. He was picked on and called names like 'Screech' by his peers (Demer, 2017). During his free time, he would play violent video games such as "Doom." Ramsey would play this game with his friends James Randall and Matthew Charles for hours after school. Prior to the shooting, it was Randall and Charles who encouraged Ramsey to plot the attack and taught him how to use a gun (Criminal Justice, n.d.). While fortunately not many were killed, this incident underscores the serious implications of violent media consumption and peer dynamics. The environment in which young people develop strongly shapes their behaviors and choices.

CONCLUSION

To sum everything up that has been started so far, the complex problem of juvenile delinquency is influenced by numerous factors, including social media, video games, family relationships, and peer pressure. The daunting statistics and dire cases provided show how these factors can easily influence the behaviors and choices of young people, often leading to violence. Incidents like the Bethel Region High School shooting, along with the actions of individuals like Salvador Ramos and Warren Leblanc, highlight how a troubled upbringing environment with exposure to violent content can lead to tragic outcomes. Preventing juvenile delinquency is a responsibility that demands cooperation between families, schools, and communities. By recognizing root causes and applying different solutions, we can work towards a better future for the next generation. It is important to act now to protect the youth and educate them to make positive choices. Readers can end with this question in mind: What specific steps can families, schools, and communities take to effectively address and prevent juvenile delinquency?

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